

# BROCHURE

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SingingCom

**Exchange of experiences on activation  
practices for adults and seniors through  
the choir**



# INTRODUCTION – SingingCom | Singing community

Erasmus+ Adult Education project

KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices

Contract no. 2020-1-PL01-KA204-082125

Project implementation dates: 01.11.2020 - 31.07.2022

Project duration: 21 months

The main objective of the project was to exchange experiences in the field of social, cultural and Lifelong Learning activation of adults and senior citizens through singing in choirs.

The target group of the project were conductors of amateur choirs for seniors and intergenerational choirs and choir coordinators: 4 conductors, 4 choir coordinators. The intermediate group consisted of choir members.

The project was to result in 4 main outcomes and all of them were achieved, which are:

- the exchange of experience and best practices between partner institutions, during 4 international project meetings held in Poland/ Lodz, Croatia/ Rijeka, Hungary/ Pecs and Slovenia/ Maribor and videoconferences on Zoom;
- the realisation of choral workshops, in four partner institutions;
- realisation of the final concert, the recording of which was uploaded to the YouTube channel;
- collection and compilation, in the form of a brochure, of examples of best practices and methods of work with amateur intergenerational choirs, choirs consisting of seniors and adults; the brochure was made available as a PDF file

on the websites of the partner institutions and sent by e-mail to all interested persons and institutions, e.g. cultural centres, etc.

The SingingCom project involved four partner institutions:

- **VIA CULTURAE** Foundation/ Poland – beneficiary of the project,
- **DANTE** - Ustanova za obrazovanje odraslih/ Croatia,
- **DISORA** - Društvo za izobraževanje in socialni razvoj/ Slovenia,
- **NHE** - Nevelők Háza Egyesület/ Hungary.

Below we would like to introduce the institutions that have been involved in the SingingCom project.

## 1) VIA CULTURAE Foundation from Lodz/ Poland

The main statutory objective of the VIA CULTURAE Foundation for the Support and Development of Culture is the creation of events and the dissemination of culture and art, in their various forms. In particular, the Foundation focuses on the promotion of Polish music, of high artistic and humanistic value, both in Poland and abroad. In addition, the Foundation pursues its objectives through:

- the promotion of Polish music, within the framework of scholarship programmes for youngartists (up to 30 years of age), financed from external funds;

- realisation of projects, financed from national and European Union funds, concerning facilitation of access to and initiation of activities within the broadly understood musical culture, as well as theatre and film;
- production of musical events: concerts, musical and spoken word performances the production of documentaries on musical themes, as well as on the arts in their various fields;
- the organisation of international meetings for young people, adults and seniors concerning the promotion and dissemination of cultural heritage and contemporary art, in the fields of music, theatre and film, within the framework of the Community Programmes of the European Union;
- helping to develop the talents of children and young people who are particularly gifted artistically;
- charitable activities facilitating access to cultural goods and 'products';
- integrating society, including children, youth, adults and seniors, through artistic activities and participation in cultural events.

The VIA CULTURAE Foundation carries out cultural and artistic projects and activities aimed at both young people and adults, including seniors.

Our projects and activities are aimed at social inclusion, through culture and art, of people from diverse groups, regardless of their age, social status, nationality, gender, religion, level of education or place of residence.

We strive to reach out to different audiences in order to activate and unite them through joint artistic activities, participation in cultural events such as concerts or performances, to enable intergenerational

and intercultural dialogue and exchange of experiences.

## **2) DANTE - Ustanova za obrazovanje odraslih from Rijeka/ Croatia**

The Adult Education Institution Dante is a competitive, modern and efficient institution that has been carrying out education programmes in Rijeka, Croatia, for 30 years. Dante now provides a variety of educational services – from formal courses and basic education, over short non-formal workshops and all the way to providing education for micro-credentials.

The Institution closely cooperates with state institutions – the Ministry of Science and Education, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, and the Croatian Agency for Mobility and European Projects. In addition to national cooperation, Dante has considerable experience in international cooperation and partnerships, having participated in the Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus+ (KA1, KA2, KA3), Europe for Citizens, and the European Social Fund. Has been awarded the 2020 Erasmus accreditation in the field of adult education for the period 2021-2027.

Dante is also a member of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and has hosted and organized numerous international meetings, training events, and conferences related to adult education.

## **3) Društvo DISORA from Maribor/ Slovenia**

Association for education and social development is a non-profit NGO from Maribor, Slovenia with the aim to contribute to better integration and social situation of vulnerable target groups.

Through programs and activities in the field of lifelong education, culture, sports and social development we address the challenges of cultural and social integration, active citizenship and various skills for the unemployed, the youths, migrants, seniors and others. Društvo Disora collaborates with various organisations at home and abroad, KUD Marice Kerenčič Pesnica is one of them.

#### **4) NHE - Nevelők Háza Egyesület from Pecs/ Hungary**

Nevelők Háza Egyesület (in English: Educators' Centre Association, ECA) is one of the leading NGOs of Hungary, which operates numerous projects and a public institution in the city of Pécs in cooperation with the local municipality. ECA's aims are to support the civil grass-root movements with its internal and external resources in order that they can grow and strengthen, and be more active and by doing so they can encourage the growth of their closer and wider surroundings. ECA provides services, training activities and educational programmes according to the principles of sheltering, counseling, empowerment and developing as well as LLL priorities.

ECA was founded in 1993, and has been working for the development of the civil society for the last 25 years. Since 1997 the organization sustains the House of Civic Communities that helped to launch several local organizations. Currently more than 90 communities - formal and non-formal civil organizations, associations, foundations, art groups etc. - are operating in the building, while ECA acts as an umbrella organisation for their benefit. Besides its infrastructural capabilities, ECA provides learning services and possibilities, training activities, forums,

research, conferences, professional consultancy, etc.

The Association currently performs the following major functions:

- provides services for non-governmental organizations (Civil Information Centre);
- operates the Baranya County Volunteer Centre;
- centre of community development activities in the region.

In the Community Centre diverse cultural, community and learning possibilities/programs are available every day for the general public. Over 50 000 visitors were registered in 2018.

ECA has managed several national and international EU funded projects as well since years. It has developed a network of relationships and contacts, from local to international level.

ECA maintains a 20-year-old fruitful working relationship with the Municipality of Pécs and carries out public services and functions for nearly 20 years.

The everyday work is regularly assisted by more than 100 volunteers and 16 employees.

ECA is the member of some international networks like EAEA, REIN as well as national networks like proHáló, CIC.

In addition, there are four choirs:

- VOXELLENCE choir/ Poland
- Jeka Primorja choir/ Croatia
- KUD MK Pesnica/ Slovenia
- Assonantia choir/ Hungary

## VOXELLENCE CHOIR/ Poland

The VOXELLENCE choir is a group of friends who share a passion for singing. Previously, the members of the group were involved in various musical projects and some of the people sang together, for several years, in other bands or choirs. At the beginning of 2019, they decided to embark on a new musical adventure and so the VOXELLENCE choir was born.

The choir made its debut in September 2019, during the XXIII International Jazz Festival in Vinnitsa, Ukraine, performing together with the Michał Kobojek Quartet. At that time, the audience could hear the songs of Stanislaw Moniuszko in beautiful jazz arrangements by Michał Kobojek - a musician, saxophonist and composer from Lodz.

Another result of this cooperation were the "JAZZ KOLEĘDA" concerts, performed in Lodz and Konstanyńów Łódzki in January 2020. The concert programme consisted of Polish Christmas carols in jazz arrangements. Both concerts were enthusiastically received by the audience.



VOXELLENCE also takes part in charity concerts, such as the "JAZZ KOLEĘDA for Africa" and the Christmas VII Charity Concert in Rzgów.

In October 2021, the VOXELLENCE choir received the Silver Diploma in the National Choral Competition during the National Choral Forum "Wrocław as a City of Music".

The conductor and artistic director of the ensemble is Kamil Gruszczyński - Master of Arts at the Academy of Music in Łódź (major: Choral Conducting and Bachelor of Arts, majors: Music Theory, Artistic Education); he is currently continuing his education at the Faculty of Vocal and Acting, major: Solo Singing, at the Academy of Music in Łódź. He is an active stage artist, conductor and pedagogue.

The VOXELLENCE choir performs in quadruphonous voice and is open to various musical genres - beginning with traditional Polish songs, through classical music, jazz, soul, gospel and ending with the most popular pop music.

The COVID-19 pandemic thwarted VOXELLENCE's concert plans and forced a temporary suspension of activities, but choir members met during online rehearsals.

SingingCom was the first Erasmus+ project in which VOXELLENCE participated. It was a unique opportunity to gain new experiences, expand their repertoire and learn about the musical culture of the partner countries in the project.

# Women's vocal group VITIS VITAE

## KUD Marice Kerenčič Pesnica/ Slovenia

Women's vocal group Vitis Vitae was established at the beginning of the 2019/2020 cultural season. We had our first performance at the Christmas concert in December 2019 in our home town. Our membership fluctuates between 10 and 15 members of all generations who are connected by the love for singing. As a group of enthusiasts with little or no previous musical experiences, we grow and mature as artists in part also due to a varied repertoire spanning from folk songs and sacral musical pieces to covers of popular Slovenian songs. We are expanding and perfecting our vocal technique and interpretation under the leadership of dedicated, determined and engaged artistic leaders - all of them musical pedagogues - initially Barbara Lešnik, later Ana Sandrin and in 2021/2022 season Eva Kovačič Ivanjko. Our enthusiasm for music could not be stopped even by the pandemic as we continued our rehearsals on-line during the lockdown.

## JEKA PRIMORJA/ Croatia

The mixed choir of the cultural-artistic society "JEKA PRIMORJA" (Rijeka, Croatia) has its beginnings in three major choirs ("Mladost", "Ivan Matetić Ronjgov" and "Jedinstvo") from Rijeka founded more than 70 years ago. In 1971, the three choirs were joined in one named "JEKA PRIMORJA" or "Echo of the Littoral". The choir's program consists of classical composers, traditional Croatian music, world music and contemporary music. The choir particularly focuses on traditional music from Croatia's regions such as Istria and Croatian Littoral.

As a representative of the city of Rijeka and Primorje-Gorski Kotar county "Jeka Primorja" performs at various national and international festivals ("Brajšini dani" – Pula, "Naš kanat je lip" – Poreč, "Matetićevo dani" – Rijeka, "Cossettovi dani" – Zagreb) and has won several prizes in its 70 year-long existence.

The choir also held concerts in Italy, France, Great Britain, Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Germany, Spain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Bulgaria. At the last international concerts in Serbia (2009) and Bulgaria (2013), the choir won 5th place and a special award for the best performance of a Bulgarian composer. In 2016, "Jeka Primorja" participated in the „ON-STAGE PRAGUE" event.

From its very beginnings, the choir was led by several famous Croatian conductors (Dušan Prašelj, Aleksandra Matić, Davorin Hauptfeld, Darko Đekić, etc.). Since 2010, the choir is conducted by maestro Igor Vlajnić, conductor and chorus master in the Opera company of Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka.

In 2020, the choir participated in the project European Capital of Culture in Rijeka as one of the leading ensembles. In 2021, the choir celebrated its 50th anniversary by holding a memorable concert and publishing a book "Odjeci Jeka" (author: Igor Vlajnić) that describes the five decades of continuous work.



# ASSONANTIA Women's Choir/ Hungary

The House of Civil Communities is located in a beautiful old villa in one of the most prominent places in the centre of Pécs. This building is the home of the Assonantia Women's Choir. The choir is made up of enthusiastic amateurs of retirement age. The number of members attending a rehearsal is between 15 and 20. The size, acoustics and facilities of the rehearsal venue are perfectly suited to the requirements. The community space is home to several choirs. Everything is perfectly prepared for the rehearsal: the room is aired out, the piano is in the middle and the seating is arranged - everything is ready for the work to begin. Ideally, these physical things should not be the responsibility of the conductor or choir members.

## **Voice training**

It is safe to say that a choir owes its development and success to its voice training. The choir rehearsal starts with 10-15 minutes of warming up, which the members soon realise the need for and are able to sing in a more beautiful and clearer voice. At the end of the singing, the voice opens up and "gets into the right place", which is very important because most of the choir members are over 60 or 70 years old. At this age, the vocal cords are no longer as flexible, the voice is typically tired, not as bright, not as high. However, with care and attention, the singers' voices can be restored to their former glory. Learning the right posture is essential for singing, and is particularly important for older, tired bodies. Singers will stretch themselves during the singing and throughout the rehearsal. Time should be taken to develop the correct breathing technique. By the end

of the process, members are taking breaths to places they never knew they could. Many people have reported using this type of breathing in their everyday lives, which is nothing more than abdominal breathing, or taking deep breaths into the lower tip of the lungs. It is not a common practice to incorporate exercise into the process of singing, but some stretching exercises that work the core muscles can be useful for all ages. The principle of gradualness and voluntary participation by members is very important. The method of singing should progress from easy to progressively more difficult, from a small range to a slowly widening range. The exercises are text exercises, taking care that the text does not distract attention from the actual training of the voice.

## **Learning new pieces**

New pieces are learned after the vocal training, usually at the beginning of rehearsal. This allows the members to concentrate more. About one piece is studied every month. These are works of varying difficulty, written for 2 to 4 voices. For amateur, older choirs, section rehearsals are not recommended as a method. The choirmaster should work with each part equally so that the community stays together throughout the rehearsal. When learning new works, progress in small sections with the piano, choosing easier, simpler, catchier passages at the beginning. They listen to the melody first, then they play it back, adding the lyrics once they are sure of the melody. Once they have a part by part, they put together the sounding material, so they can listen to a tiny section



of the performance, which is motivating enough to learn the whole piece. The aim is to get rid of the piano as soon as possible, and it often helps to say the text in rhythm, regardless of the melody. Initial success always encourages the choir to learn further parts and, in the longer term, to learn new pieces.

### **Interpretation**

The interpretation of a choral work can take place after the ensemble has learnt the piece and there are no technical or vocal problems. In addition to the interpretation of the text, the conductor should at this point pay attention to the appropriate dynamic nuances, the structuring of the work, the recording of accents and tempo changes. These performance issues should be discussed with the singers, explaining what the conductor is trying to achieve and what effect he wants to create. Only by clarifying these can the choir respond correctly to the conductor's movements and gestures. However, these should always reflect the elements that have already been discussed and clarified. It should also be remembered that the interpretation of a work can change over the years, depending on the venue and the occasion.

### **Motivation**

The members of our amateur choir, especially the lovely elderly ladies, are brought together by their love of music and singing, so there is a common basic motivation, but this would not be enough to spend many years together, loving and singing. We have a sincere respect and admiration for the elderly people who come up every week, with all their physical ailments, to the House of Civic Communities

to spend an hour and a half together, singing. As well as rehearsing, the choir members also get together for other community events. An important motivation for an artistic ensemble is to perform, to showcase themselves and their skills. Twice a year, at Christmas and at the end of the season, they hold an intimate choir gathering, where they invite friends and other interested people to a concert with a joint celebration. The next level is to perform at city events and local festivals. It is an important motivating force and a great honour to sing together with the city's prestigious choirs in various illustrious venues. The greatest motivating force is the positive feedback from family members and grandchildren.

### **Choosing the repertoire**

The repertoire, a constantly enriching and expanding set of works, can range from canons, through bicinium for two voices, to more demanding, difficult works for three or four voices, from periods spanning the whole of musical literature. The repertoire should be adapted to the singers' abilities. Singability is very important, in terms of the difficulty of the work, its pitch and the notes themselves. Older voices are not as fresh, young and cannot soar as high, and for this reason, where necessary, works can be transposed to heights they can no longer sing. The artistic value of the piece is not diminished. It is important for the ensemble to sing both a cappella and accompanied works, with piano or organ accompaniment. It is a great honour in the life of an ensemble to have a composer write a piece for them.

The programme should be appropriate to the place and the occasion, and should not be too long (usually 15 to 20 minutes), given the age of the members, who have difficulty standing and getting on and off the stage. If possible and known, the needs of the audience should be taken into account.



# INSTRUCTIONS

## Room

Choir rehearsals should take place in a room with a minimum of 1m<sup>2</sup> per chorister. It is important that each member of the ensemble has comfortable eye contact with the conductor, for this purpose the conductor usually stands on a raised platform. The room will have the advantage of being well ventilated, or able to be aired or air conditioned. In the latter case, one should be careful not to set the cooling temperature too low or the fan power too strong, as it is easy to catch a cold this way.

The acoustics of the rehearsal room should be characterized by minimal reverberation. In a reverberant hall, voices do not blend together and it is easier to hear all the mistakes and imperfections. The rehearsal room should be equipped with a well-tuned piano, which is helpful in reading the piece and accompanying vocal and instrumental pieces.

**Vocal training** aims to: equalize the sound of different vocal registers, develop the ability to graded dynamics, and use correct pronunciation. In order to achieve such an effect, it is necessary to teach the group proper breathing habits (diaphragmatic breathing), and correct positioning of the vocal apparatus (lowered larynx, raised soft palate). Most intonation faults are caused by a lack of vocal technique, which can be trained during sing-along. Vocal warm up is the beginning of every rehearsal. In this way conductors develop a proper singing posture, which is maintained throughout the whole rehearsal. Singing serves to maintain hygiene of the vocal apparatus.

It should be differentiated depending on the time of the day when a rehearsal takes place. It is also determined by the requirements of the choir's repertoire.

Preparing to the rehearsal, a conductor should get acquainted with vocal problems included in the rehearsed programme. They usually concern articulation, scale of voices, dynamics or timbre that will be desired in the piece. It is important to prepare the rehearsal and not to tire the ensemble. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the scale of exercises used in the rehearsal. Even if the repertoire on which the choir works contains high notes, the ensemble should not be excessively forced in the highest register during the sing-along. It is also worth practicing the characteristic harmonic combinations occurring in the worked-out pieces.

## Learning new pieces

Reading sight-reading can be problematic for choristers (especially amateur choirs), so it is important to break it down as much as possible, first reading the text at a tempo in the written rhythm, then singing the melody on one convenient syllable and finally combining the text with the correct pitch. In the case of fast tempo pieces, it is important to work on the piece a little slower when reading it, and to introduce the correct tempo after time. It is important not to deal with all the markings in the score from the beginning. The first rehearsals with new pieces the ensemble should sing with a bold sound without dynamic limitations, so that the new melodies and sounds settle comfortably in the

muscles of the vocal apparatus. Only then should the ensemble introduce and enforce proper dynamics in accordance with the composer's intention.

Certainly, in amateur ensembles it will be extremely helpful to make recordings of particular voices available to choir members for their own work. It is then necessary to pay special attention to the correctness of the recorded part, because in the case of a mistake it is extremely difficult to teach the choir members a wrongly learned melodic line.

### **Interpretation**

The basis for working on the interpretation of a piece is the belief that the ensemble has already mastered the technical aspect of working on the piece related to playing the notes at the right time and dynamics. The interpretation of a piece depends on many factors that cannot be discussed here. Certainly, attention should be paid to: climax and places of quieting, support and dynamic nuances, agogic (tempo) changes, articulation, correct accentuation in accordance with the prosody of the word and timbre depending on the character of the piece. All these issues should be discussed with the choir members, and then presented, so that everyone understands what effect we want to achieve. An important element of working on the interpretation of the piece is also the correct reaction of the ensemble to the conductor's gesture. It should be a reflection of the previously discussed elements that make up the interpretation. We should pay attention that the ensemble's reaction is adequate to the conductor's gesture.

### **Motivation**

Motivation in a choir is one of the fundamental aspects. An ensemble motivated to work will eagerly attend rehearsals and prepare for them. The main catalyst for work at rehearsals is the upcoming concert, so in adult choirs a clear concert schedule with many performances is important. An encouragement for individual work of choristers are recordings of parts of particular voices prepared by the conductor. It is important that these recordings are easily accessible and in a file that most electronic devices can easily play. Motivating the team to work together will also be social meetings outside rehearsals, celebrating important moments, joint trips, charity actions, as well as successes: winning an award at a choral competition, performing in a prestigious place or with a recognised artist or ensemble.

### **Voice training and health**

The basis of singing is breath and its management. During voice training, care should be taken not to strain the voice too much, not to allow any kind of stiffness or tightness. Be careful not to overdry the throat, so it is not recommended to do too many and too long breathing exercises at once. It is also worthwhile for choir members to have water at their disposal during rehearsals, and to control the hydration of the vocal apparatus themselves. The basic elements of voice training will focus on:

- paying attention to breathing using the diaphragm muscles,
- extending the exhalation phase,

- encouraging the emission of sound with the soft palate raised,
- provoking legato singing,
- equalizing the sound of all vowels,
- combining chest and head resonators while singing.

It is important to strive for a natural sound of the voice in all exercises, which will not cause unwanted tension or forcing the voice.

### Choosing the repertoire

A piece of music is spiritual food for the ensemble, on it the performers shape their artistic taste, and by influencing their surroundings they often have a great impact on shaping the musical culture of a given environment. The main criterion for selection is the adjustment of the level of difficulty of the composition to the choir's performance capabilities. We can distinguish several most important aspects which make up the level of complexity of the compositions:

- texture (homophonic, polyphonic),
- amount of voices (traditional SATB division, simpler or more advanced division)
- type of harmonics (modal, functional, sonoristic),
- dynamics (dynamic contrasts, extreme dynamic markings),
- the scale that the individual voices must have,
- rhythmic and agogic complexity (fixed or variable metric markings, agogic changes, fast or very slow tempo),
- the language of the piece (native or foreign).

The skill level of the ensemble can be distinguished based on three factors:

- choristers' musical education (in the context of reading notes with the voice),
- vocal awareness of the choir members (in working with their own vocal apparatus),
- musical sensitivity in leading the phrase.

A choirmaster choosing a repertoire for his ensemble should adjust the difficulty level of a piece to the ensemble with which he works. Matching the difficulty level of a piece to the choir's performance abilities does not mean, however, that the choir should not include in its repertoire the pieces whose difficulty level exceeds the choir's abilities. The choir should be confronted with more difficult literature in order to develop. The danger appears when a choir has in its repertoire only works exceeding its performing abilities. The conductor should choose works for the ensemble so that their level of difficulty is diversified.

The choice of works performed is also influenced by the space in which the concert will take place. Especially for early music or church music the reverberation connected with the original purpose of these works to be performed in sacral space is important. Motoric pieces with great rhythmic complexity will sound selectively in a concert hall with little reverberation.

The conductor should go to the concert venue in advance and assess the acoustic possibilities of the hall where the performance will take place. If this is not possible, it remains for the conductor to make such an acoustic check during the dress rehearsal.

The conductor choosing the repertoire must pay attention to the volume and composition possibilities of the choir. There are works that require a massive sound of a large ensemble, for example, in works from the Romantic era and also works where a light and bright vocal emission is desired. In the case of music from past eras, it is necessary to refer to the idea that the composer had of the piece and its performance.

Depending on the profile of a given choir, works that will bring didactic, artistic, utilitarian or entertainment value should be included in its repertoire. The conductor should take an objective approach to the selection of works to be performed with the ensemble, so as not to remain indifferent to the taste of the choristers and the audience who will attend the concert. However, he must not flatter the susceptible to mass culture tastes of both performers and listeners. The choice of repertoire should consider the condition of the ensemble and the perceptive capabilities of the audience.

The dynamic level that a choir is able to achieve determines the possibility of a given choir to perform with the instrumental accompaniment of a symphony orchestra, a string or other chamber ensembles.



# INDIVIDUAL AREAS OF VOCAL TECHNIQUE

The basis for any activity is knowledge of the technique and operation of the apparatus that is performing the task. In the case of singing, the singer in the choir must know the basic mechanics of voice formation. From this knowledge, with the help of a teacher or choirmaster, they can begin to get to know and discover the diversity of singing.

## 1.1. POSTURE

Posture is important for the balance and stability of the body, which allows us to breathe better and support and consequently produce sound. A good posture is also important for overall well-being between classes, rehearsals, and performances. The body is effectively aligned when we can draw an imaginary vertical line from the top of the head, across the middle of the shoulder joints, and the pelvis of the knee to the middle of the instep, just in front of the ankle. To achieve this position, we must turn our head forward, lift our chest, as in a military position, and turn our pelvis slightly forward. We also need to stand on full soles, with our feet in the width of our hips, knees never fully extended, but slightly



loose. The whole body position should be relaxed and comfortable. (Dayme, 1997)

## 1.2 BREATHING

Breathing is the most important element of singing. It all starts and ends with a good breath. We have touched on this chapter lightly at the beginning when we took a closer look at the organs that make up the singer's instrument. Breathing, which we use with minimal physical activity, requires very little physical effort and is a completely subconscious action. The message from the brain causes the diaphragm to contract, causing the space in the chest to increase, the lungs to stretch, and the pressure to drop relative to atmospheric pressure. This creates a vacuum that causes the lungs to fill with air. Exhalation involves the process of releasing the diaphragm and returning the abdominal organs to their original state, which reduces the volume of the chest. The action is followed by the lungs, which expel air. A healthy adult inhales about 17 times at rest. (Dayme, 1997)

We distinguish between three types of respiration. Subconscious breathing (mentioned above), speaking, and singing. Singing has a lot in common with speaking. In both cases, the breathing is characterized by a short inhale and a long exhale. When singing, the inhale must be silent, that is why some teachers will ask you to breathe through the nose or the mouth or use a combination of both. Exhalation, which is long when singing, is characterized by calmness and evenness. (Groebming, 1946-1950)

Singing instructors distinguish four types of inspiration. Shallow breathing, chest or side breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, and compound (combined) breathing. The latter is a combination of other ways of breathing, in this way we can fill all the lungs with air. (Groebming, 1946-1950)

### 1.2.1 Supglutinal pressure

A very important area that must be explained in learning to breathe is the subglottic or. subglutinal pressure. It is the pressure exerted by the exhaled air on the partially obscured vocal cords. We need to regulate and understand subglottic pressure if we want to have good control over our voice. We must be careful not to confuse tension due to pressure with tension in the muscles in the throat and neck. If we feel tension in the muscles, we have poor vocal technique, which can lead to injuries. A good singer knows how to use different strengths of this pressure and at the same time control the quality and intensity of the tone. (Dayme, 1997)



## 1.3 VOCALS AND INTONATION

### 1.3.1 The start of the sound

When we finish inhaling, exhalation usually follows. We will replace the exhalation with singing. This is done by closing the vocal cords (which were open during breathing) slightly. This limits the amount of air that can flow through the vocal cords, and we hear this as singing. The rest of the air is returned to the

lungs, where it helps control the diaphragm's steady rise as a counterweight to the action of the muscles of the torso and pelvic floor. (Danev, 2008) Sound can be produced in two ways, from below (in Italian) and from above (in German). The beginning of the sound from above is more suitable for singing German or French repertoire, choral singing, and it is characterized so that it works well in the low and middle ranges, and a little less in the high range. (Danev, 2008)

### 1.3.2 Appoggio

A huge number of singing teachers derive from appoggio as a basic element of singing (often in conjunction with breathing). In Slovene, the words appoggio and "naslon" (Eng. lean) are used

alternately, but they mean the same thing. We lean on the articulation point located just behind the upper teeth. From here, vowels are arranged along the oral cavity. A concrete lean requires a good understanding and use of the soft palate to produce sound. (Danev, 2008)

### 1.3.3 Vocalizing - singing vocals

The purpose of vocalization is the technical editing of the voice. These are singing exercises on all vowels, and the purpose is a continuous and smooth operation of all organs in different situations (we may need a vocal A that is more open than I, which affects the singing technique). (Danev, 2008)



In the Baroque era, the composers took care of the vocalizing rehearsals for singers. They wrote them in the score of certain songs. From there, the technique expanded and became a broader concept. The purpose of vocalization is to explain and assimilate the connections between the characteristics of our singing instrument on one hand and breathing on the other. (Danev, 2008)

Once we master the placement of the leaning and breathing, we start singing exercises on the vocals. We start with vocalizing in the first octave, ideally using a slow tempo. With these exercises, we learn to properly open the mouth, relax the lower jaw and tongue, the function of the soft palate, and breath. (Danev, 2008)

We usually start humming with our mouths closed, continue with the vowels i, e, a, o, u, followed by consonants, and lastly the words. (Danev, 2008)

#### **1.3.4 Vowel A**

To form this vowel, it is necessary to open your mouth and let go slowly and not convulsively, similar to yawning. The lips should not overlap the teeth, and the tongue should be completely relaxed and lie flat in the oral cavity, behind the teeth. When singing this vocal, we should avoid straining the corners of our mouths and singing flattened vocals. Vocal A is suitable for relieving cramps in the tongue, lips, and lower jaw. (Gregorc, 1982)

#### **1.3.5 Vowel E**

The mouth and tongue have a similar position as they do for the vowel A. In the case of a wide E, the tongue is slightly raised towards the soft palate at the root, but the tip of the tongue is kept behind the

lower teeth. However, in the formation of a narrow E, the lips are less open, not rounded. The tongue should touch the lower front teeth. (Gregorc, 1982)

#### **1.3.6 Vowel I**

I has the highest "pitch" of all vowels. It brings a certain shine and penetration to the voice. When creating this vocal, the mouth should not be widened, otherwise, the tone will be too sharp and penetrating. When singing I, the teeth and lips are slightly open, and the tongue is convex and touches the lower teeth. The lips should not overlap the teeth. (Gregorc, 1982)

#### **1.3.7 Vowel O**

The narrow O is one of the "dark" vocals. When singing the narrow O, the lips should be slightly pursed and rounded, the jaw a bit open. The tongue should be slightly raised and behind the lower teeth. We have to be careful not to get a flat or flimsy tone when singing this vocal. We can help ourselves by paying attention to the nasal resonance. The wide O is very close to the vowel A. (Gregorc, 1982)

#### **1.3.8 Vowel U**

This vowel gives a very richly rounded resonance. When we sing it quietly, it is ideal for detecting the main resonance or main register. It is suitable for coloratura training and singing higher tones. In the middle position, we need to add some chest resonance to it, otherwise, it loses its shine, resonance, and softness. The vocals are formed with pursed lips, with teeth slightly apart. The tongue should touch the teeth with the tip, and the back of the tongue should fit the size of the throat. (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.3.9 Vocal equalization

When a singer masters the singing of individual vowels, it is necessary to ensure a seamless transition from one vocal to another with special exercises. This is called vocal equalization. The starting point is the resonances of individual vowels. During rehearsals, we pay attention to the accuracy of intonation when changing vocals. (Gregorc, 1982)

## 1.4 CONSONANTS

When we master the vocals and the connection between lean and breath, our attention can then be focused on the pronunciation of consonants and later on whole words and sentences. Consonants include resonants (M, N, L, J, R, V) and obstruents (P and B, T and F, G and K, F, S, Z, Ž, and H). The resonants are most similar in colour to vowels which, due to their resonance, are the bearers of melody in vocal compositions. (Groebming, 1946–1950)

### 1.4.1 Resonant M

With M have a slightly closed mouth, which opens up the upper resonant spaces. Because of these properties, M is ideal for the practice of singing in “a mask” and finding resonance. Because the tone is placed very forwards, we need to be careful so it does not become too compressed or even nasal. It is recommended to connect this resonant with a vowel (ma, me, mo...) during exercises (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.4.2 Resonant N

Unlike the previous one, the resonant N is sung with slightly parted lips. The tongue is flat and glued to the back of the upper incisors. In this way, the tongue forms a barrier for airflow, which must go to higher

resonant spaces and find its way out through the nose. However, as with M, we must be careful that the tone does not become nasal. (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.4.3 Lingual resonants L and R

It is characteristic of both that the tongue is largely involved in the formation of these vocals. L is sung with an open mouth, the tip of the tongue lightly touching the hard palate. The airflow thus travels along the sides of the tongue and through the mouth. We have to make sure that only the tip touches the palate, otherwise, a compressed, lumpy tone is created. With the R, however, the airflow moves around the tongue, the tip of which vibrates slightly. Exercises in combination with I and T are suitable, as these vowels also help to set the voice correctly. (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.4.4 Resonants V and J

These resonants are similar to obstruents in their origin. We shape them so that the flow of air obstructs the tongue before leaving the oral cavity. The vocal F, which otherwise falls into the lower category, behaves similarly. (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.4.5 Obstruents

The consonants P and B are created with the help of air that passes through the oral cavity and the front of the tongue, past the teeth, and over the lips. When pronouncing, an ‘explosion’ of air occurs, followed by an immediate connection with the vocal.

The barrier at T and D is the tip of the tongue, which rests on the upper incisors, and the hard palate, while G and K are formed by the tongue’s surface pressed against the soft palate.

The sounds S and Z are formed with the tip of the tongue resting at the upper teeth and making a partial obstruction of the air. If we lift the tongue slightly at the sides, we get the sounds Ž and Š. (Gregorc, 1982)

If we slightly change the position of the mouth when saying I and narrow the airflow by bringing the front of the tongue closer to the palate, we get the sound J, and if we bring the back of the tongue closer to the palate, we get the sung H. The sounds Č and C in singing are pronounced as TS and TČ. (Gregorc, 1982)

From what is written above, we can now understand that the vowels in speech and singing are slightly different, mostly due to the greater intensity of the utterance. (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.5 INTONATION

Purity and precision of tone is the desire of every musician, whether we are talking about singers or instrumentalists. If there is bad intonation, the harmonic conditions of the song are broken, which is usually less obvious to the audience, but most often very clear to the singer and conductor. There are several reasons for bad intonation. For someone who is tone-deaf, the simplest reason is simply a lack of natural ability to regulate your pitch. In this case, a person can learn to sing but will never sing the right tones, because they aren't able to self-regulate their pitch. Poorly developed listening skills can be corrected and trained, but it will take a lot of patience and effort, but the singers may never be confident enough, especially if they find themselves in the role of a soloist. (Gobec, 1987)

### 1.6 DYNAMICS - THE VOLUME OF SINGING

Dynamics is a part of music that deals with different volumes of tones. The basic levels are forte and piano, and from them derive the sub levels: piano pianissimo, pianissimo, mezzopiano, mezzoforte, fortissimo and forte fortissimo. This also includes crescendo and decrescendo (increasing and decreasing in volume), and certain articulatory changes such as marcato, sforzato, fortepiano, etc. (Gobec, 1987)

As for the theoretical side of singing, we can say that just louder or quiet singing does not cause major problems for singers. They occur when we talk about gradually louder or quieter singing, rising, and falling. Especially with the latter, singers have more problems as it requires more control over the abdominal muscles than growth, which is a more natural phenomenon (Gobec, 1987).

### 1.7 ARTICULATION - THE EXPRESSIVENESS OF TONE

Articulation in the original sense of the word means the clear pronunciation of vocals. In music, however, it refers to the clarity of tones. In choir and solo music notation, the most common articulation marks include marcato, sforzato, staccato, and tenuto. Articulation also partly includes legato and non-legato, portato and glissando. With different articulations, we can change the characteristics, and add an accent to individual melodies and phrases. That's why they are a very effective interpretation tool if they are technically well-executed. (Gobec, 1987)

### 1.7.1 Marcato

Marcato is performed by briefly squeezing the diaphragm with the abdominal muscles, causing a sudden burst of air from the lungs past the vocal cords. We need to do this to emphasise every such note. We know two types of marcato: the agogic, which is shorter and more jerky, and the dynamic, which is noted as a smaller sign for decrescendo, and we perform it similarly to forte-piano. (Gobec, 1987)

### 1.7.2 Sforzato (also sforzando)

Similar to the marcato, sforzando are accents that are even sharper and more pronounced. There is no major difference while performing, but it is necessary to support the tone more. It is important to be aware that these accents, are usually just slightly louder than the other tones and are not always forte. They are, however, less effective in a higher pitch (sopranos and tenors). (Gobec, 1987)

### 1.7.3 Staccato

Staccato is created by performing short notes with short diaphragm pushes so that the vocal cords close quickly after the tone is produced. A new breath is needed for each subsequent tone. Staccato notes are half as short as written notes. So if we see a written crotchet in the note line, with a staccato sign, we will perform as a quaver. (Gobec, 1987)

### 1.7.4 Tenuto

Tenuto is the opposite of staccato. In this way of singing, the tones follow each other without interruption, with a slight emphasis on each note. (Gobec, 1987)

### 1.7.5 Other articulations

Other articulations include legato and non-legato singing, portamento and portato, etc.

Legato indicates that musical notes are played or sung smoothly and connected. It is usually marked with a slur and is performed in one breath, just as we sing folk songs.

Non-legato indicates a smooth, pulsing articulation, commonly used in singing hymns.

Portamento is a way of singing that is only suitable for solo singing. It indicates a connection between two tones by singing all intermediate tones and semitones. This causes the tones to melt into each other. But when we sing individual accented tones, we say we sing portato. We use it when we want a motif to stand out from the crowd. We should also mention the glissando, which is reminiscent of the siren. It is about connecting two tones with gliding intermediate tones. Glissando begins as the tone starts and lasts the whole note value. (Gobec, 1987)

## 1.8 RESONANCE

Resonance is the sound of at least two bodies producing sound at the same time. As airflow travels past our vocal cords it also carries with it certain vibrations. Resonance is created by oscillations of sound in the mouth, sinuses and nasal cavity, and trembling of the bones, especially the spine and chest. Weight and muscle mass do not affect resonance. (Gregorc, 1982)

Resonance gives the original tone strength and range, fullness and penetration. The reflection of the airflow gives the tone warmth and softness. This creates a natural vibrato in the hard palate. We distinguish between cranial resonance, including cheek and

frontal bones with associated sinuses, and thoracic resonance, the spine and chest. (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.9 REGISTERS

The term register is most often associated with the organ or accordion, but this term is widely used in singing as well. The human voice knows three registers, the head register or voice, in which only the edges of the vocal cords shake, the mixed register, and the chest voice, in which the vocal cords shake completely. At a lower pitch, the chest register is the predominant one, while the head voice predominates in a higher pitch. (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.10 VOICE RANGE

The range of an individual's voice depends on the length and thickness of their vocal cords. When we talk about soloists and professional singers, it is considered that their range is greater than the singers we meet in choirs.

Female high voices - soprano, in average reach from C4 - C6 (coloratura soprano to F#6), we need to know, however, that people differ from each other, which affects both their range and the volume of their voice. Mezzo-sopranos reach from G3 - H5, while low female voices sing from G3 - A5 (contra-alto from F3 - F5). High male voices - tenor, ranging from C3 - C5 (an octave lower than sopranos), baritone from A2 - F4, and low voices - bass from E2 - F4 (double bass D2 - E ♭ 1). (Gregorc, 1982)

### 1.11 TEMPO AND FLEXIBILITY OF VOICE

The lyrics can distract us singers from the tone and melody. When we have a lot of experience behind us, this is usually not a problem for us, but when singing

in the choir we often find ourselves facing a problem due to the speed of the lyrics. In this case, the lyrics need to be assessed separately from the music. First, we practice slowly, if we sing in a foreign language we pay attention to the correct accents of the words, the length of the vocals and the correct pronunciation. With each reading of the lyrics, we can gradually start increasing the pace, we need to, however, make sure that the diction is still clear and supported by the diaphragm. (Gobec, 1987)

# VOICE CARE

Singing requires good physical fitness. Visits to the gym, running and aerobic exercise can help with overall better fitness. It is also necessary to pay attention to what kind of air we breathe. The singer should avoid air-conditioned, smoky and overcrowded spaces. It is necessary to pay attention to the humidity in the air, as dry vocal cords are more vulnerable to injuries (it is recommended to drink fluids when singing or speaking for a long time). (Dayme, 1997)

A very bad habit that a lot of people have is clearing their throats. The act is often subconscious, but very harmful to the voice, as it causes vocal cords to come together in a very violent way, which can cause trauma. It is better to just swallow the saliva, or clean the throat in such a way that we open the throat and make the gesture as inaudible as possible. (Dayme, 1997)

An exercise regimen is also very important for voice health. It is recommended that singers (beginners in general) who do not have much experience with singing, rehearse for shorter periods and strictly follow the rehearsal regime provided by the teacher.

This is a particularly important fact that should be taken into account by all conductors of amateur choirs. If they demand real marathons from the singers, the vocal technique will suffer, as well as the voice of the singers. (Dayme, 1997)

## 2.1 AGEING OF VOCAL CORDS

Ageing is a life process that also affects our voice. Due to structural and functional changes in our throats, our voice changes throughout life. With age,

the voice loses resonance and power, we notice characteristic changes in pitch and range, which are more noticeable in men. In women, the basic pitch of the voice drops steadily from the age of twenty onwards, while in men it drops until the age of fifty, and then, due to the decrease in the mass and elasticity of the vocal cords, it slowly begins to rise. Breathing and support problems can also be seen, as we lose muscle mass and flexibility as we age, and our ability of finesse decreases. (Davies & Jahn, 1998)

## 2.2 SMOKING

Smoking is very detrimental to the health of the voice. Not only because the smoke dries out the mucous membranes and vocal cords, which contributes to injuries, but cigarette smoke also contains harmful substances that cause changes in the mucous membranes in the throat and further down the trachea to the lungs. Smoking is associated with lung, oesophageal and pharyngeal cancer and many other diseases.

# LEARNING TO SING



Knowledge of the mechanics of singing is important for the singer, but even more for the teachers, as they must adapt the interpretation and exercises to the age group and the learning methods, to the prior knowledge of the choir. Different singing techniques and schools can help them with this, and make it easier for the singer through the whole process of learning to sing.

Solo singing teachers and choirmasters face several challenges in their work. They must know how to sing correctly, consider vocal technique and know the terminology. Then they have to convey this abstract intangible thing to uneducated people, with different prior knowledge of the human body and notions of singing. (Dayme, 1997)

Throughout history, teachers have resorted to a very unrestricted, empirical approach to teaching singing. This approach gave birth to some good singers, but many times the student got the wrong idea, which

was then passed on through time from teachers to students. Thus, the singing began to be learned based on feelings, which were not necessarily related to the actual usage of the singing apparatus, which led to wrong vocal techniques. In the last forty years, however, people have also begun to take an interest in the physical side. So now singing is taught as a combination of psychology, sports, science and art. (Dayme, 1997)

## **3.1. METHOD BASED ON THE HEAD OR CRANIAL TONE**

Representatives of this method are dr. Reinecke and Professor Bruno. The method guides the student from the main voice, the falsetto, down to the middle register and finally to the full, chest register. The head and mixed voice are developed from the top down, and the chest register is connected to them from the bottom up. We strengthen the tone by developing

and being aware of resonance, and at the same time, the breathing develops evenly with the voice. (Gregorc, 1982)

Gregorc (1982) described this method with ten points:

1. developing speech and singing tone simultaneously
2. single register (single-register design from the head, mixed and chest register)
3. with the starting point of the treble in the head piano
4. by forming a wide throat cavity, eliminating the pharyngeal muscles and actively helping internal and external tensions
5. formation of vocals using a long and narrow sound tube, with pursed lips, and cheeks drawn inwards (as in whistling)
6. by developing the voice from top to bottom
7. by opening the nasal and pharyngeal cavities
8. with resonance exercises (M, NG)
9. with a sequence of vowels O, U, Ę, E, Ü, I, A
10. by rehearsing scales with the same vocals and mixing them

### 3.2 METHOD WITH THE STARTING POINT FOR MIXING REGISTERS

What is registry equalization anyway? With this term, we're describing a smooth transition from one mixed register to another. We must pay attention to these registers when singing dynamics and when raising or lowering the intonation. (Gregorc, 1982)

The Viennese pedagogue Ito based his method on mixing these registers. He develops it in such a way that it comes from mechanical action, the vibration of vocal cords. The vocal cords can vibrate in a variety

of ways. They can either vibrate whole or only the edges. The result of these differences is different resonances, head and chest, which can be mixed as desired and thus create a smooth transition between different parts of the song. A good tone always develops from a mixture of both vibrations, never from the result of just one. (Gregorc, 1982)

If transitions from one register to another are audible, the listener perceives them as a void in the phrase. Ito calls them registry divergences. In this case, there is a loss of vocal cord contact, which affects the voice. Prolonged use of this method of singing usually results in overloaded vocal cords (injuries can occur). In women, this transition is observed around the tone E3, and tones C4 to E4, and in men, it is usually between tones C3 and F3. (Gregorc, 1982)

### 3.3. MIXED TONE STARTING METHOD

The method with a starting point on a mixed tone was set up by the singing pedagogue Schwarz. His method can be captured in three points.

1. Respiratory and laryngeal functions are treated simultaneously.
2. Movements for correct speech are trained on the articulatory principle, which connects the tongue, mouth, jaw and throat
3. Breath and speech merge into a beautiful voice. (Gregorc, 1982)

Successful voice formation is possible by sharing the first and second points, as too much breathing is not ideal for voice development, and excessive and convulsive pronunciation can hinder a beautiful tone. In this method, we omit vocalizations and other



singing exercises, as the method refers to the singing of the text. A prerequisite for the implementation of this method is the elimination of bad habits of the past, and the starting point is a strong middle position. (Gregorc, 1982)

### **3.4. METHOD STARTING FROM THE THORACIC REGISTER**

This method was set up by educator Armin. It is characterized by taking tone design and the study of pure sound as the basis of the technique. This method explains that the study of singing is not just a study of notes and technique, but occupies the whole person. This method requires talent, true character and the possibility of a continuous multi-year study. (Gregorc, 1982)

The study consists of five levels:

- 1.** general theoretical and practical foundations of tone and voice. This is about learning the tone, proper breathing and half-heartedness of the teacher's singing. Pupils learn in the quartet interval (men  $c1 - f1$ , women from  $c2 - f2$ ). the base tone is the right tone, this determines the shape of the vocals, the breath, the pitch and the strength of the tone
- 2.** The second stage is dedicated to developing breath and support, expanding vocals and achieving better sound. However, vocals and lyrics are not used.
- 3.** continue to develop support and breath. At the same time, we concentrate on the tone, use dynamics, and begin to form words with consonants and vowels.

**4.** gaining independence. The sound of the right tones becomes clearer and clearer, a light chest tone develops in the pitch, which is equalized through all the registers.

**5.** Playfulness in all forms. Here we adopt staccato, trills, fast tempo, etc. (Gregorc, 1982)

# WORKING WITH THE CHOIR

## 4.1 SPACE

The work begins with the preparation of the classroom or the space where we will have the choir practice. The room must be bright enough, ventilated and suitably large. In a space that is too big, the voices of the singers will be lost. A result of which may cause the singers to want to be louder, which they mostly achieve by putting too much pressure on the vocal cords and the wrong vocal technique. In a space that is too small, the voices blend, and the choirmaster often has trouble hearing the choir as a whole.

## 4.2 SINGING EXERCISES

When a teacher, choirmaster, is well acquainted with the principles of vocal technique, their task is to transfer this knowledge to singers interestingly and understandably. Not only so that they will understand, but so that they will be able to accomplish the task given to them. Many exercises can be found in various literature, but often we have to adapt them to the length, text or speed of the composition. It is important that each rehearsal has a purpose and that it develops a certain aspect of the singer's vocal development. We have to be careful not to overwhelm the singers with an abundance of different rehearsals, especially if we lead an amateur choir. It is best if we have some standard rehearsals that singers know how to sing, and new rehearsals should be shorter, interesting, and more to spice things up. When the singers have completely mastered a certain rehearsal, it is necessary to transfer it to the music literature that we are singing at the time. If, for

example, we paid a lot of attention to the BRRR exercise, we can now sing the melody of the song on BRRR. However, we still warn the singers about the correct performance.

## 4.3 CHOICE OF REPERTOIRE

The repertoire can be chosen based on several factors. The first thing we pay attention to choosing the repertoire based on the group that we lead. Male choirs should sing a repertoire for men, women for women and youth choirs for youth. We can always spice things up and add a piece, that we have rearranged for the specific group, but the song will never sound the same. For example, if we compare only the sound produced by women in their 40s or 50s, it cannot be compared to the sound of a youth choir, even if the song is suited for everyone.

It is also necessary to find a song that will not be too high or too low. It is my opinion that composers' compositions should not be transposed without their permission. Not for a village performance, not for a world competition. The composer deliberately decided on a certain tonality (different scales and shapes have different sounds and conjure up different characters), so interfering with the musical material is to some extent even disrespectful. Here, of course, the question arises of smaller or newly-formed choirs, for which we will not find much literature. Here we choirmasters must overestimate how far we will go in transposing or arranging musical material. We have a little more room for manoeuvres in folk songs, especially if the song is written 'in a folk tone'.

#### 4.4 REPERTOIRE LEARNING AND INTERPRETATION

The task of a good choirmaster is to come to the rehearsal as ready as possible. With their knowledge of vocal technique and music theory, they must be able to anticipate which parts are more difficult, and where most mistakes will occur and prepare singers for this in advance. For example, they can put together a singing rehearsal that includes parts of the song that causes the singers trouble and take care of that part the singers start with the song itself. When using the echo method, they need to be careful not to make any mistakes and give examples with the correct vocal technique. They need to point out the correct pronunciation and try to put a lot of emphasis on certain details. This makes further work and interpretation much easier, as the choir won't make those smaller mistakes.

Before starting with the interpretation of the song, the choirmaster can tell the singers the story they want to convey with the song. They can talk about the feelings of the composer, and the character that sings in the song, the very structure of the song, the highs and lows, so they can create an image, before actually starting to sing. After that, the singers should practice the interpretation of the song, while singing, in small parts, mostly in phrases. If there are major technical errors, they should eliminate them first with rehearsals (as in singing), and only then do we sing the song. In this way, singers can still turn their attention to several aspects of the song at the same time, as we approach it from different angles.

#### 5 MOTIVATION AND SOCIALISING

A big reason why people choose to sing in a choir is socializing. They like to enjoy themselves, have a few drinks and have a good time in the company of good people. An important part of a rehearsal are breaks, where the singers can relax, connect and get to know each other, as this strengthens ties in the group and relationships, which also helps with singing and interpretation, performances as a whole group. We also need to be great motivators during the exercises themselves. We need to know individual singers, their personalities, nature, and vocal abilities, and be a support and encouragement to them. Someone needs a lot of encouragement to start singing at all, others need encouragement and patience because they don't want to change (wrong) singing techniques.

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The image shows an open music book with several pages of musical notation. The notation is written on multiple staves, featuring various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. The book is open to a page that appears to be a continuation of a piece, with the notation flowing across the staves. The paper is white, and the ink is black. The book is resting on a dark wooden surface, likely a piano. A person's hand is visible at the bottom right, positioned over the piano keyboard. The overall scene suggests a musician practicing or performing a piece of music.

# EXERCISES

## Starting the rehearsal:

Muscle relaxation exercises

1. Walking around the room first on tiptoes, with arms stretched above the head, then on heels and bend over.
2. Knees are bend. We are doing circles with our upper body. First, we bend over, swinging with our knees 8 times (body is relaxed), then we swing to the right (8 times), to the back (8 times) and to the left (8 times). We repeat that circle 3 more times, first with 4 repetitions on each side, then with 2 and lastly with 1.
3. Face massage
4. Patting the body

## Second part of the rehearsal

Exercises of articulation apparatus

1. Counting teeth with tongue
2. Imitating driving car with sound BRR, from very high, to very low
3. Stretching out your tongue

## Third part of the rehearsal

Breathing exercises

1. Bend over, with inhale we slowly start to stand straight. Pay attention to the stretching of your ribs
2. We try pronouncing letter P without opening our mouth
3. Sitting on the end of a chair, we slightly lift one leg, to activate diaphragm, and slowly exhale on the consonant "S"

1. Pronouncing consonants "f", "s", "m", "t" in 4/4 time, firstly as quarter note on each letter, then two eighth notes, then as triplets
2. Breathing out steadily on the consonant "S" in 7/8 time; first two notes are staccato, the third is tenuto
3. Taking a breath on 4 measures in 4/4 time, holding the breath for 4 measures and exhaling at 4 measures on consonant "S". Repeat 4 times.

# EXERCISES TO BE USED DURING ONLINE REHERSALS

## Starting the rehearsal:

Muscle relaxation exercises

- 1.Stretching, climbing up on tiptoes with arms stretched high
- 2.Shaking head right and left, up and down
3. Arm circles
4. Trotting on the spot
5. Patting the body
6. Shaking hands and feet

## Second part of the rehearsal

Exercises of articulation apparatus

- 1.Counting teeth with tongue
- 2.Yawning with mouth closed
- 3.Pushing out cheeks with tongue
- 4.Filling cheeks with air
- 5.Smacking, clapping your tongue, snorting

## Third part of the rehearsal

Breathing exercises

1. Inhale steadily, hold your breath and exhale
2. Still breathing in, holding air and exhaling on the consonant "S"
3. Vigorous compression of air on "f"
4. Blowing out vigorously on the consonant "f"
5. Blowing out steadily on the consonant "S" in quarter notes in 4/4 time
6. Slow release on the consonant "S" in eighth notes in 4/4 time

7. Breathing out steadily on the consonant "S" in eighth-note triplets in 4/4 time; consonants may be changed from "S" to "P, K, T or F"; gradual lengthening of breath, breath control

8. Taking a breath on 4 measures in 4/4 time, holding the breath for 4 measures and exhaling at 4 measures

9. Taking a breath on 2 measures in 4/4 time, holding the breath for 2 measures and exhaling in 4 measures

10. Taking a breath on 1 measure in 4/4 time, holding breath for 1 measure and exhaling on 8 measures

11. Taking a breath on 1 measure in 4/4 time, holding the breath for 1 measure and exhaling on 10/14 measures

# WORKING WITH CHOIRS

## AUDITION OR NO AUDITION?

When working with amateur choirs, there is always the question of whether the singers should be required to pass strict auditions or not. Nowadays, there is a significant decline in people interested in participating in amateur choirs, which often leads conductors to accept members who are not perfect singers. Before, this would have been unthinkable. However, besides singing, today's choirs have many different obligations: taking care of sheet music, musical instruments, uniforms, publicity, finding financing, writing projects, organizing concerts, traveling, bookkeeping, archives, etc. Consequently, being a member of the choir today does not only involve singing but many other tasks as well. Therefore, in our choir, we have an agreement that there is always room for all those who are willing to work and learn. Of course, when singing, it is necessary to keep a certain quality, but those who find it more difficult can always be more active in those roles where they feel safe and be very careful where they do not.

## BREATHING AND VOCAL TECHNIQUE

Nowadays, people rarely breathe properly. A sedentary lifestyle and the lack of physical activity contribute to the fact that the muscles are poorly developed and the breathing is weak and shallow. That represents a problem in singing, so you have to be careful when working with the choir. Breathing exercises should therefore be an integral part of any rehearsal today. In the beginning, we use breathing exercises to strengthen the diaphragm, but also to

calm down and focus better on the work that follows.

A few deep inhalations and exhalations are enough, which can be accompanied by raising (inhalation) and lowering (exhalation) of our hands. After that, we can breathe in and let the air out gently, producing the "s" sound. We can also compete over who can do it longer, which can often be fun. Breathing exercises are followed by singing.

We usually start the singing with a murmur. The intonation starts from the middle of the singing range, and the first exercises should only focus on a few tones. The exercise is performed by repeating this pattern of half-tones upwards and then downwards. As we tune in, the exercises become more extensive, and the range of voice expands upwards and downwards. After mumbling, we start using vocals in the following order: i, u, o, e, a. If we are going to learn a new composition at the rehearsal, the conductor can pick a harder place and use the melody for the singing exercise. It makes it easier to learn. The singing lasts 15-20 minutes.

## SELECTION OF REPERTOIRE

The big question is always what to sing. There are however some guidelines and rules. First of all, we have to be aware of the possibilities of the choir and the compositions should match the upper limit of the possibilities. It means we will be able to learn them, but it will be challenging. Choirs that have existed for many years often already have a certain type of music that they perform, so the repertoire can be chosen from that.

The smaller the number of members, the easier it is to arrange the repertoire, and when the choir is large, it is best that the repertoire is chosen by the conductor. The choice of the repertoire never suits all members, but that is normal. It is important that the repertoire is such that it is appropriate, that it makes sense in view of the planned performances and projects and that it meets the expectations of most members. Sometimes it is good to take a composition that is outside the comfort zone of the choir members, and singing a cappella is always harder and keeps the singer fit.

### **ADAPTATION OF REPERTOIRE**

The repertoire can be adjusted as needed. It primarily relates to the change in intonation. Also, sometimes conductors or other persons make some adaptations of the compositions (arrangements), which is also common.

### **LEARNING NEW COMPOSITIONS**

When learning new compositions, the difference in singers and their quality is most visible. That can sometimes be a problem. Repetition is one of the best ways to learn a composition, so it is important to start learning on time. The pace of learning should not depend on the best or the worst singer, but should be at the upper limit of speed. This way better singers are not bored and the weaker ones see it as a challenge. If the composition is shorter or easier, it can be learned immediately with the whole choir. However, if it is estimated that the learning might take longer, it is better to divide the choir by voices. It is never good that some members sit and wait too long at rehearsals. During the pandemic, ways of learning

with the help of digital tools (recorded materials that members listen to at home) began to be used, which proved to be useful.

### **WORKING WITH OLDER SINGERS**

A particular problem can be working with a choir in which older singers predominate. Over the years, the physical willingness to sing has weakened, and singing voices are losing strength, freshness, intonation, etc. Learning new compositions is also harder for the elderly, and at the same time, the elderly are the most regular in singing rehearsals! The question often arises whether the elderly should leave the choir because they can no longer sing so well? The answer should be negative. Many of these people may have been singing for decades, and very often have so much experience that greatly benefits them in their work. In addition to having more time (retirement) to perform various tasks for the choir, they can often help the conductor and other singers. The leadership of the choir should bear in mind that the emphasis of many competitions and projects is precisely on the activation of the population of the third age, so senior choirs can also have great advantages. It is certainly necessary to adjust the repertoire and performances, as well as rehearsals. It is important to talk to these members and make them aware of their situation and encourage them to some additional engagement and cooperation.

### **MOTIVATION**

Motivation is an extremely big problem nowadays. The bigger the choir, the lower the visibility of individuals, so very often singers have the impression that they work very hard only to perform as part of a large



group of people. Besides that, many singers work all day and it is not easy to come to rehearsals regularly. All this should be acknowledged and the singers should be thanked.

In order to maintain motivation, it is necessary to pay attention to having a quality repertoire that will be interesting and challenging. A good atmosphere in the choir is also crucial, which must be positive and collaborative. The singers must want to come. Performances and trips improve the atmosphere and raise the cohesion of the group. However, travels are the most beneficial as the singers get to spend some days together. This helps create long-term ties within the choir. We recommend at least one multi-day trip per year. Motivation can also be raised by giving other tasks with regard to the expertise of members outside music, all in accordance with the needs of the choir and the organization in which the choir operates.

### **WORKING IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many choirs suspended work, and unfortunately, some ceased to exist. The use of digital technologies helped a lot because the rehearsals could also be held remotely. Unfortunately, the technology is not so advanced that it could allow simultaneous singing at a distance (due to the delay of sound), but it has nevertheless enabled the maintenance of vocal technique, fitness and learning of the repertoire. We are absolutely sure that even in the coming times, the use of digital tools will remain present because it has proved useful even in "normal" times.

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